

# Cowaplunger duds!

Written by dreamkatcha. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

None of this would have been possible without the fantastic resources generously provided by immensely talented emulator authors, and communities such as Hall of Light, Lemon Amiga, Lemon 64, World of Spectrum, Moby Games, World of Longplays and Recorded Amiga Games. Thank you for your tireless dedication to preserving the history of gaming.

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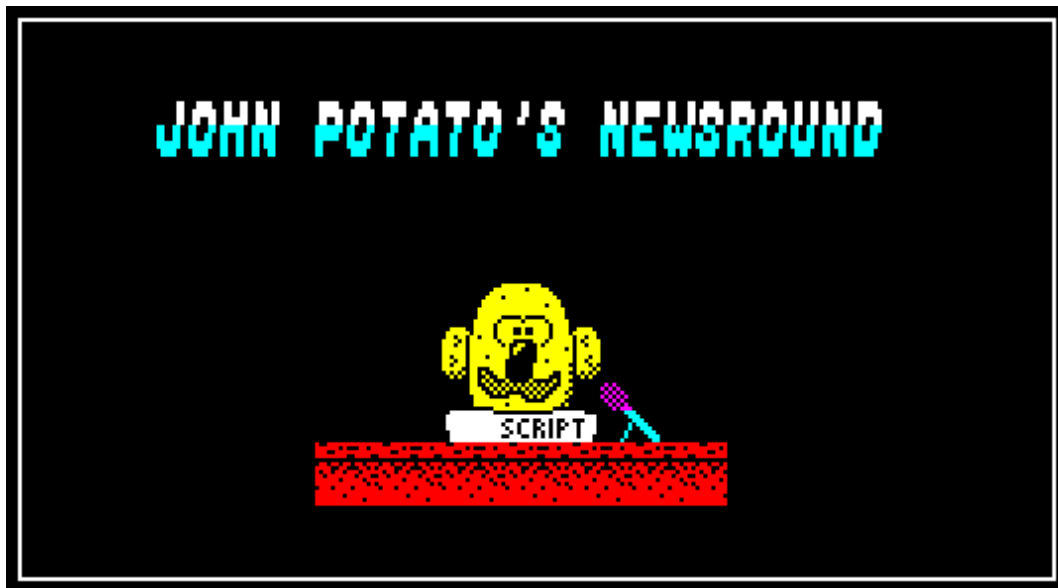
If you took some of the people responsible for producing the British satirical puppet show, Spitting Image, and let them run riot creating a kiddified version hosted by a snarky, cantankerous crocodile and set it in a grimy London sewer you'd have 'Round the Bend'. At its core it was a parody of the Saturday morning magazine format shows popular at the time such as Going Live and Motor Mouth which featured the usual blend of music, cartoons and general waffle strung together by an amiable host.



In fact, it took the magazine metaphor literally, designing the show around a comic book with various segments contributed by Doc Croc's unpaid rat underlings. Vaudeville Vince Vermin, Jemimah Wellington-Green and Luchetti Bruchetti (aka Lou Brush) - who he'd keep in line by brandishing his swooshing tail as a potent weapon - provide the deliberately cringe-worthy, low-brow humour, while Aardman Animation took care of the cartoon interludes and stop-motion effects.

With its irreverent style and toilet humour setting the tone, the show ran for three series between 1989 and 1991, originally broadcast on Children's ITV before being syndicated. Rumour has it that complaints generated by Mary Whitehouse's society-nannying organisation were what eventually put the kibosh on the Bendy quintet, although there's no evidence to support this belief.

Many of the cartoons were brazen spoofs of whatever was popular at the time so a nappy-wearing 'Wee-Man' stood in for He-Man, 'Couldn't-Care-Less-Bears' was a substitute for Care Bears, ThunderPants served as a knock-off ThunderCats, and rather than Batman, Round the Bend gave rise to Botman with his much-revered backside. In between was John Potato's Newsround, clearly a parody of John Craven's Newsround, a dumbed-down tea-time news show aimed at kids. A number of original sketch characters fleshed out the remainder of the 20-minute runtime.



Zeppelin, spotting that Round the Bend was popular with the kids, and that kids like computer games, scooped up the license to merge the two mediums. In 1991 they commissioned Wisemen Productions to develop a platform game for the Spectrum, Commodore 64, Atari ST and Amiga, and published the TV tie-in title under their premium price Impulze label. Make sure you're sitting down on a sturdy seat - preferably with stabilisers fitted - when I tell you this; it was titled 'Round the Bend'. No, *really*. It was so people would know it's inspired by the TV show.

Out of the blue, two years later, Zeppelin re-published exactly the same game as 'Doc Croc's Outrageous Adventures', this time as part of their Platinum range. You'd think this might be explained by the expiry of their licensing rights, except the original title is also featured on the box, almost as a subtitle, and can subsequently be seen in the opening welcome screen graphic. It would have been a shame to tinker with that since it will be the only thing standing between you and the format disk function. An immaculate pixelated facsimile of the show's main cast members, guaranteed to tee us up for disappointment upon launching into the main game.



You begin in Doc Croc's dingy sewer office where you'll find the crew wandering back and forth like mindless lemmings waiting for you to select one of them for your first reconnaissance mission. Choose a character, followed by a pipe (the entrance to each level) and you're on your way. Your aim is to recover the pieces of a video printing press invented by Luschetti Bruschetti. Courtesy of Croc's incompetence it has been accidentally obliterated, scattering all the pages of the latest edition of the Round the Bend comic around his underground hovel.



Fast-forward, fast-forward, fast-forward... there we go, sorted. Can we all go and watch the TV show on YouTube instead now? No? OK, as we were...



Along with the machine's components we'll need to gather up the punchlines to each of the pages by actually entering their comic strips. These platforming mini-games entail traversing the cells from top to bottom, left to right, avoiding various hazardous characters plucked from the TV show as they bound about their respective environments. Only the pages belonging to the currently controlled character can be explored, so if you've picked the wrong one you must stride over them and return later as another character. Likewise, only Lou Brush can grab the machine parts.



As if that wasn't frustrating enough, it's a one hit and you're dead affair. Well, technically not *dead*, although you're forced to return to Croc's 'editorial office' to try again from the beginning... if you can summon the supreme inner strength required to battle against the mind-numbing tedium of it all. Given you can collide with a pogoing foe three nano-seconds into a level, every move you make requiring pixel-perfect avoidance tactics with little time to dawdle as you race against the clock, playing Round the Bend is the most Groundhoggy thing you can do outside of watching Groundhog Day whilst walking the wrong way on a travelator. Wielding no weapons whatsoever, the whole thing becomes a laborious exercise in precision evasion with no real incentive to do so.



Reading the manual I was struck by a faint glimmer of hope when I realised that Round the Bend's Neighbours parody makes a cameo appearance in the game. Zeppelin inform us that "The ever popular Australian soap, The Vegetables, are holding a skateboard race. As usual, calamity is only around the corner, so watch out for crashes and mixed salad." As Zeppelin were also responsible for the official Neighbours isometric racing game I thought there might be a sliver of a chance for a bit of self-referential fun-poking. Ha! Not a sausage! (or even a vegetarian 'soysage'). All we get is a couple of potatoes riding a skateboard each back and forth on a fixed circuit.



With no token cameo by way of compensation from Transformatoid, Octopus Slime, or his arch-nemesis, Armadillotron, you may as well flush this down the toilet's u-bend along with the camera used to film the TV show's introduction.